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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT, REBELS AND IMPARTIAL FORCES DISMANTLE
BUFFER ZONE

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[¶1.](#) (SBU) Representatives of the Ivorian army, the New Forces and ONUCI and Licorne peacekeepers signed an agreement on April 11 to dismantle the zone of confidence (ZOC) starting Monday, April 16. The drawdown of the ZOC will begin at midnight in a concrete step to implement the Ouagadougou Peace Accord (OPA) signed by President Gbagbo and NF Secretary General and now Prime Minister Guillaume Soro in

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March. ONUCI and Licorne force commanders have professed optimism that the elimination of the ZOC will succeed in reunifying the country and furthering the peace process. In a press statement today, ONUCI averred that the dismantling of the buffer zone will not create major upheaval on the ground. The OPA specifies that ONUCI and Licorne troops monitoring the area will be reduced by half every two months until their complete withdrawal by December 16, 2007. They will be replaced by joint patrols of Ivorian army and NF troops. President Gbagbo announced that for the first time since 2002 he will visit former NF controlled areas in the north before the end of the month.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) COMMENT: The ZOC has been crime-ridden, especially in the western region, since its creation. Impartial forces were unable to do anything more than turn criminals over to the NF or the government. Given the security concerns, residents in villages in the ZOC are likely to be nervous about the drawdown of the impartial forces. However, in the long run, reasserting Ivorian control may help to normalize the area. END COMMENT
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